

Annual Report from the Chair – Abney Park User Group AGM 2025

Thank you all so much for coming. It's wonderful to see so many familiar and new faces here tonight, united by a shared love for Abney Park.

It's been a remarkable first year for the Abney Park User Group. I'm delighted to say that we've welcomed 172 new members so we're now at 235 and counting!

That's a fantastic milestone — and it shows just how much interest and energy there is around this special space.

As an officially recognised park user group, we are an active member of the wider Hackney Parks Forum - that means more recognition, more dialogue — and more impact on a borough level.

Our Aim & What We've Achieved

Our aim is simple, but powerful: to help foster a sense of ownership and care for Abney Park — where people don't just use the park but feel part of it. I'm proud of what we've achieved toward that goal:

- we've held quarterly meetings, open to all, where anyone can bring ideas, raise concerns, and stay informed.
- we have an amazing group of committee members who meet monthly and deal with lots of issues behind the scenes. I would like to thank them for all the time they have given us this year.
- one of the first things we did was to set up monthly meetings with Tom Dawson, the park manager. Many thanks to Tom for these meetings, which we have used to discuss day-to-day issues and future plans for the park.
- We also introduced a monthly walkabout with Tom for everyone to come along to. It's been a brilliant way to notice what's happening on the ground — from fallen trees to new growth, and to ask questions and make suggestions.
- We are trying to get communal walks off the ground – do join us on Wednesdays at 6pm
- We have also had a few “meet and greet” sessions, where we've done snapshot surveys to find out what brings people to the park.
- We also published our first newsletter, which we hope will become a regular and useful way to keep everyone in the loop.

Eyes and Ears of the Park

One of the most important roles we've taken on is being the eyes and ears of the park — noticing what's happening and speaking up when something needs attention.

- On a very serious note, there have been several incidents of indecent exposure over the last year, which we've reported and helped alert others about.
- We've also flagged the appearance of kibble, bones, and some other really unsavoury materials, and we've asked park management to remove them swiftly.
- We've have supported the park management in dealing with two specific incidents involving dogs.
- We've also been liaising with park management to get more signage and bins in place — especially in areas where people have been picking plants, or where they need to be reminded of the rules concerning dogs and rubbish. Clear, well-placed signs can make a big difference, and we'll keep pushing for more where needed.
- We've also been very happy to work with the council to keep the café and picnic area a 'dogs on leads and off grass' area on a voluntary basis — a small change that's made a real difference for families and others who want to enjoy that space comfortably.
- And finally — on a very positive note — we've been monitoring the issue of dog poo, and I'm thrilled to report a huge improvement! This shows how awareness and community effort really does pay off.

The Fun Stuff

It hasn't all been hard work. There's been plenty of fun and celebration too:

- We participated in the Grand Reopening of the park after all the refurbishment work in July. It was a brilliant event - a real showcase for Abney Park and everything it has to offer.
- We took part in World Cleanup Day in September which was productive, positive, and good fun.
- Our Christmas social was a warm and festive gathering — full of conversation, laughter, and connection.
- And of course, our communal walks continue to be a highlight — come rain or shine!

Building Bridges & Supporting Each Other

A big part of our role is to be a conduit — a bridge — between the community, the council, and Abney Park Trust.

I want to take a moment to thank Susan Fajana-Thomas, our local councillor, who has been fantastic in responding to issues like rubbish and maintenance. It makes a real difference when there's someone on the other end who listens and acts.

We've also been pleased to support the Trust by promoting their wonderful programme of events. Thank you to the Chair Tom Walker and his team of Trustees for all their work. Also, a special thank you to Haydn, who manages the mapping, tracing, and documenting of Abney Park graves.

Likewise, we're proud to support Abney Ecology Volunteers, and we'd love to see more people get involved. Their work is so important in protecting the wildlife and biodiversity of this unique space. But nobody knows more about the trees and plants – especially fungi - than Gina Rackley, who has run some amazing, highly informative guided tours which are not to be missed.

Thanks also to the Thursday morning landscape volunteers and monthly litter pickers who keep this place beautiful. We'd really like to encourage more people to join them. And thanks to all the ad hoc litter pickers too!

It's no secret that there have been tensions between the various parties that run and use the park in the past, but we hope that is all behind us. We believe in coming together, in building good will, in dialogue and in recognising that we all share this wonderful park. The more we collaborate, the better it will be for everyone.

Looking Forward

We will continue to press Abney Park Trust to open membership to members of the public, because we believe everyone who cares about the park should have that opportunity.

We will shortly be delivering an open letter to the Trust, asking for a more inclusive approach.

And we'll keep on working with park management to encourage transparency, cooperation, and community involvement.

In Closing

I want to say a heartfelt thank you to every one of you.

Whether you've joined a walk, reported an issue, picked up litter, offered feedback, or simply walked through the park with a sense of care — you've made a difference.

Let's keep going together, to protect, celebrate, and share the treasure that is Abney Park.

Henrietta Walker

Chair

15th July 2025